Ostrogorski Centre BelarusDigest





Belarusian Army: Its Capacities and Role in the Region

Siarhei Bohdan

Analytical Paper 4 | 18 August 2014



Pictures: www.mil.by, Sergey Grits

London
2014

Ostrogorski Centre

Minsk
Box 117, 36 Adzintsova vul.
220136
Belarus
minsk@ostrogorski.org

London
4, 52 Penn Road
N7 9RE
United Kingdom
london@ostrogorski.org

This study has been supported by

NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Analytical papers are published in London by the Ostrogorski Centre.

Please cite as follows:

Siarhei Bohdan, Belarusian Army: Its Capacities and Role in the Region, Ostrogorski Centre Analytical Paper 4, 18 August 2014.

This paper is available at http://belarusdigest.com/analyticalpapers

Contents

Executive Summary

- Belarus successfully formed its own national army in 1992 while making use of favourable premises already available to them after the Soviet Union's collapse. Minsk merely transformed the well-armed, trained and supplied Soviet military units of the Belarusian Military District into its own national military force.

- The successful transformation proceeded with relative ease thanks to the fact that there were more than enough ethnic Belarusian officers and specialists in the Soviet army to build a full-fledged army for the independent nation.

- Year after year, Belarus has been spending the bare minimum on its army. Although it has more soldiers than many European countries, this stems not from any particular military ambitions or needs, but from the government's aspirations, at least partially, to use the army to promote patriotism among people.

- The Belarusian army possesses some advanced arms and equipment, which have increasingly degenerated over time as the government has not been spending the necessary amount on either acquiring new arms or maintaining their current stocks. Russia has renounced its policy of providing arms to Belarus at symbolic prices.

- In addition to fulfilling traditional security-related tasks common to any national army, Belarus' armed forces play an important role in Belarus-Russian relations. Given Minsk's alliance with Moscow, one of the major functions of the Belarusian army is to serve as a front line of defence for Russia's main political, economic and military centres. This role helps the Belarusian government at the bargaining table, as it can use its armed forces to get favours from Moscow in other spheres.

- Minsk has failed to maintain the strength of its national military at a level that was satisfactory to Moscow, and, as a result, Lukašenka has had to face an enhanced Russian military presence in the country since 2013. Yet the Russian military presence in Belarus remains limited. Russia has neither in interest in nor the means to attempt a repeat of the 'Crimean scenario' in Belarus.

- The current Belarusian leadership displays neither ideological nor geopolitical rigidity in its views or policies. Its closer ties with Russia and China, as opposed to the United States and the European Union, stem from an almost cynical pragmatism.

- Lukašenka and his entourage were also responsible for initiating the launching and enhancing of cooperation with NATO, a partnership which has silently, yet incrementally, proceeded since 1995.

Introduction

Belarus has successfully organised a national army which, for all its strengths, is in need of further reforms. To optimise its military, the country must determine its own role in the world. Presently, the Belarusian armed forces play an important part in relations with Russia, yet, at the same time, pose no threat to regional stability. Belarus possesses minimal offensive capabilities and its military cooperation with Russia is faltering.

Some officials in neighbouring countries (Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and in recent months, the new Ukrainian authorities) have expressed concerns about the entanglement of the Belarusian and Russian militaries. Yet, these concerns seem to be exaggerated. They are caused more by internal political issues in their countries, as well as relations with third nations and military blocks (America and NATO), than by an actual threat stemming from the perceived military strength or capabilities of Belarus' armed forces.

The first part of this paper critically assesses the first two decades of the Belarusian national army's existence and analyses its current capabilities, structure and trends of development. The second part focuses on the international dimensions of Belarus' national security strategy, focusing on its specific notion of neutrality, relations with Russia, and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and NATO.

The author is grateful to Dzianis Melyantsou of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies and Andrei Parotnikaŭ of the *Belarus Security Blog* for their generous comments and helpful criticism of the first draft of this paper.

Belarusian Army

History

Since the late 1990s the Belarusian leadership has discussed the necessity for maintaining a strong military in the face of threats allegedly posed by NATO and, presumably, Western interventionist policy. In July 2013, Aliaksandr Lukašenka said, 'new countries under seemingly nice pretexts […] become the subjects of open aggression. Such complicated circumstances oblige us to be concerned about our security. Belarus has no geopolitical ambitions, yet we will defend our national interests with all means possible'[1]. One of which is, of course, the national army.

> In early 1990s 240,000 soldiers and officers were serving in the Belarusian Military District. By early 2013 the numbers of military personnel had been scaled down nearly fourfold

Belarus inherited its national armed forces from the Soviet Union, a military force that was in nearly perfect condition at the time. There were several ways in which the newly independent nation benefited from its inheritance.

First of all, the Belarusian Military District (BMD) from the Soviet era effectively encompassed the whole territory of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic during the whole history of its existence. This was not the case with other Soviet Union republics. They were either united regionally into one military district, or had several military districts inside their borders. Reforming this system after independence brought about a number of problems for the other new states. Minsk, however, was spared such problems.

Second, the Belarusian Military District received state-of-the-art weapons and equipment due to its location in the immediate rear of the supposed frontline between

1 Euroradio, 2013. 'Lukashenka: u Belarusi net geopaliticheskikh ambicii', 4 July <http://euroradio.fm/ru/lukashenko-u-belarusi-net-geopoliticheskih-ambiciy> [accessed 11 July 2014].

NATO and the Warsaw Pact states. Furthermore, a number of essential military education facilities existed in Soviet Belarus which were immediately available to take up the task of training officers for the new Belarusian army.

Third, Belarusian industry contained a lot of high-tech factories that produced components for military equipment, although, even with these factories, Belarus could not supply its army with nearly any end-use products on its own. Finally, contrary to most other post-Soviet nations, Belarus inherited no conflicts within its territory or in the vicinity of its borders. This provided the national army with time to form and develop while preventing its intrusion into politics.

In 1991-1992, Minsk cautiously handled the issue of establishing a national army. The nationalist opposition camp was too weak to influence the decision-making process. The chairman of the Belarusian parliament Stanislaŭ Šuškievič signed the Agreement on the Commonwealth of Independent States' Joint Armed Forces with an added stipulation that it would apply to Belarus for only two years. Unexpected factors accelerated the decision to establish a separate national army. Before the March 1992 Kiev CIS summit, Belarus faced problems in its negotiations over CIS military arrangements. The CIS General Staff had asked for a considerably bigger contribution from Belarus than the Belarusian government was willing to allocate[2]. As Richard Falkenrath noticed, 'Belarus sought a Russian subsidy for its defence and, when this was not forthcoming, announced its intention to go its own way'.[3]

The Belarusian army has, however, still performed the additional function of promoting its citizens' socialisation which it inherited from the Soviet army.

The Government Directive of 20 March 1992 'On the Establishment of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Belarus' founded the Belarusian army. The Soviet troops of the BMD were smoothly converted into Belarusian military units. Yet one of the first tasks of the Belarusian government was a reduction in its numbers. 240,000 soldiers and officers were serving in the BMD. By early 2013 the numbers of military personnel had been scaled down nearly fourfold since 1991.

Some opposition politicians believe the country does not need armed forces of this size or magnitude. Chairman of the United Civic Party Anatol Liabedźka called Belarus a country with 'militarist inclinations' and believes, 'we have [in our country] a case of overproducing military cadres'.[4]

Human Resources of the Belarusian Armed Forces

In February 2014, *Belorusskaya Voyennaya Gazeta*, the official publication of the Ministry of Defence revealed that the Belarusian Armed Forces contains about 59,500 personnel, including 46,000 soldiers and 13,000 civilians.[5] It means that per thousand inhabitants, Belarus has less than 5 soldiers. This figure is higher than in many other nations in its region, such as: Ukraine - 2.8, Germany – 2.3, Latvia – 2.6, Lithuania – 2.5, Poland – 2.6, Russia – 7.2, Kazakhstan – 3.2, Georgia – 8.3.

The Belarusian army has, however, still performs the additional function of promoting

2 ITAR-TASS World Service, 1992. 'Belarus to form its own armed forces on 20 March', 18 March; Sinyakevich Igor, 1992. 'Raznoglasiya s Genshtabom SNG podtalkivayut Belorussiu k sozdaniyu sobstvennych vooruzhennykh sil', *Nezavisimiya gazeta*, 21 March.

3 Falkenrath, Richard, 1995. *Shaping Europe's Military Order: The Origins and Consequences of the CFE Treaty*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, p. 205.

4 Belsat, 2011. 'Liabiedźka: u Bielarusi "pieravytvotcasć" vajennych kadraŭ', 2 November <http://belsat.eu/be/wiadomosci/a,5585,liabiedzka-u-bielarusi-pieravytvorchasts-vaiennykh-kadrau.html> [accessed 11 July 2014].

5 *Belorusskaya voennaya gazeta*, 2014. 'Vooruzhennye Sily Respubliki Belarus' na sovremennom etape razvitiya, 34, 22 February <http://vsr.mil.by/2014/02/22/vooruzhennye-sily-respubliki-belarus-na-sovremennom-etape-razvitiya/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

its citizens' socialisation which it inherited from the Soviet army. Most European states' armies no longer perform this role. Thus, the government regards the army and military service not only as the backbone of the national defence system, but also as a mechanism for promoting patriotism and civic responsibility. It is precisely this phenomenon that explains the numbers above, with the government having a much more keen sense of potential trouble in these arenas.

These analogies fail to account for the significant differences in the Belarusian and Ukrainian situations - no serious political confrontation and societal split in Belarus makes it different from Ukraine

Today, recruitment for the Belarusian army takes place according to a kind of 'mixed' principle. About 60% of its military personnel are professional servicemen and nearly 40% are conscripts. Compulsory military service for men still exists. The draft is, however, is not as harsh or comprehensive as it was in Soviet times.

Since its inception, the Belarusian army since has had few problems with its officers and specialists whose absence severely hampered the formation of national armed forces in the new independent states of the Caucasus and Central Asia. The newly independent Belarusian state attracted numerous ethnic Belarusian-officers from the former Soviet army, who were serving outside Belarus but who were willing to return to their native country. In the last year of the BMD's existence, ethnic Belarusians made up 16% of officers. However, by June 1994 that figure reached 47%[6].

Unlike the security agencies or police, the army is not Lukašenka's closest ally. The government values security agencies and internal troops under the Internal Ministry because they are necessary to maintain power. His distrust of the army means that he never uses army units to crush protests. The army is unlikely to play a role in a political dispute (it has never done so). Yet, its personnel are an untapped source of support for change.

Looking at the demoralisation of the Ukrainian army, some political movements in Belarus have drawn analogies with the Belarusian situation[7]. However, these analogies fail to account for the significant differences in the Belarusian and Ukrainian situations – first of all, the absence of any serious political confrontation and societal split in Belarus makes it very different from its neighbour to the south. Moreover, there were no facts of subversive activities in the Belarusian armed forces. There are also few facts of organised criminal activity comparable with those committed in Ukraine, for instance the sale of strategic weapons, which took place in the Ukrainian military.

Structure

The structure of Belarus' military forces underwent significant changes after independence. It should be noted that its composition differs significantly from its predecessor, the BMD Soviet army units. The army now includes: a) ground forces; and b) air force and air defence (these components were united in December 2001); special operation forces; and some auxiliary services and units.[8]

On 20 August 2013, Aliaksandr Lukašenka held a conference on the future priorities of Belarus' armed forces. He proclaimed that 'while analysing recent conflicts and wars, we understood that the most important thing for us today is air defence and an air force' and called these forces 'the key component of our armed forces'.

6 Rozanov, Anatoli, 1995. 'Belarusian Perspectives on National Security and Belarusian Military Policy', in Bruce Parrott, *State Building and Military Power in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, London, p. 200.

7 Polskie Radio dla Zagranicy, 2014. 'Bielaruskaja armija nie zachoča abaraniać Bielarusi ad Rasiei', 18 June <http://www.radyjo.net/4/91/Artykul/174200#sthash.OeEEeAaT.dpuf> [accessed 9 July 2014].

8 The official web site of the Ministry of Defence of Republic of Belarus, 'Struktura Vooruzhonykh Sil Respubliki Belarusi' <http://www.mil.by/ru/forces/structure/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

By 1995 the Belarusian army adopted a corps/brigade system in place of the division/army system used during the Soviet times. Three army corps were created, alongside independent mechanized brigades (each after wartime mobilisation these would comprise number 3,000-5,000 men). Special operations forces (mobile forces) constitute another important component of the Belarusian armed forces. As early as June 1995, President Lukašenka issued a decree establishing mobile forces. They number about 5,000 men. These include two reformed airborne units. One of the units incorporated the famous Soviet Army's 103rd Viciebsk Guards Airborne Division, which is now two independent mobile brigades in Viciebsk and the 38th Air Assault Brigade (now the 38th Independent Mobile Brigade in Brest). The 5th Independent Brigade of Special Forces in Maryjna Horka near Minsk was also created.[9]

The Belarusian armed forces' bases are located mainly in the western regions of the country. The reason behind this being, according to one Belarusian defence minister, that its army units stayed where the infrastructure necessary to support it had already existed[10]. Although the location of its forces correlates with the general military plan that Minsk is carrying out in the name of its ally, Russia, the Belarusian state did not strategically plan, nor implement, the establishment of its armed forces but merely inherited them from the Soviet Union.

Territorial Defence: the New Grand Army of Lukašenka

In recent years, the government has been paying more attention to its territorial defence units. Minsk established a territorial defence system in the early 2000s. But for years its existence was strictly formal in nature. In October 2011, following military manoeuvres in southern Belarus, the Belarusian leadership ordered the formation of a new army called the territorial defence troops. These defence forces play a dual role. Apart from defence functions, these units contribute directly to the evolution of Belarusian public administration.

This concept resembles what Muammar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein once tried to do in their countries. They claimed that parallel paramilitary and military units would strengthen national defence at little cost. In the cases of Libya and Iraq they effectively undermined the national armies. Lukašenka has said that, 'territorial defence shall encompass the entire state and its people. If necessary, we are going to spend huge sums on it'. He also promoted the civilian governors of the six Belarusian regions to the rank of general.

The Belarusian leadership has attempted to create a territorial defence system following more recent Baltic and Cold War-time West German and Scandinavian experience

Lukašenka plans for the new army to ultimately grow to 120,000 troops.[11] This is large number of soldiers, twice as high as the regular national army.

Under these new reforms, the regional administrators should solve not only economic and social problems, but they are also responsible for the military component. According to Lukašenka 'our governors are military and responsible people, therefore starting today the second part of your life is military security. You should organise territorial defence manoeuvres'.

According to Lukašenka, territorial defence forces should cooperate with the conventional army. Other countries' experience (like Libya, Iraq or Iran), however, has shown that this kind of structure to be both counterproductive and inefficient. Of

9 The official web site of the Ministry of Defence of Republic of Belarus, 'Sily specyjalnykh operacii' <http://www.mil.by/ru/forces/sso/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

10 Interview of general Anatolii Kostenko in *'Vo slavu Rodiny'* from 17 June 1994.

11 Boboed, Ulyana and Olga Erokhina 2011. 'Za kazhdym avtomatom dolzhny byt' zakrepleny konkretnye liudi. Shutki v storonu', *Komskomolskaya pravda*, 4 November <http://www.kp.by/daily/25782/2765862/> [accessed 9 July].

course, Minsk probably does not realise this. As Andrej Parotnikaŭ of the *Belarus Security Blog* comments, the Belarusian leadership has attempted to create a territorial defence system following more recent Baltic or Cold War-time West German and Scandinavian experience which has never been proven in real battle conditions.

In the past, the Belarusian head of state talked about engaging businessmen in territorial defence, where they presumably could play the role of grassroots leaders. Such an approach may prove attractive for some entrepreneurs who actually engage with the local authorities.

Financial Problems

Over the past decade, Belarusian military expenditures have remained low by international standards. During the 2000s, the country never allocated more than 1.48% of its GDP for defence (amounting to 4-5% of the state budget). Spending on defence remained relatively stable with, for instance, only $611 million being allocated to the nation's defence budget.

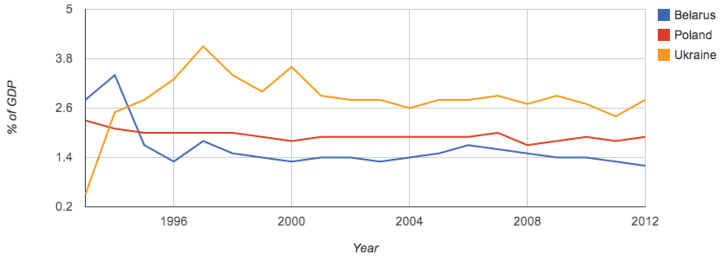
This prolonged neglect has created an acute situation for Belarus. Indeed, it has led the government in recent years to increase the national defence budget to begin to deal with the armed forces' decline. In 2012, defence spending accounted for 1.6% of GDP, in 2013 –1.8%, and this year (2014) it reached 1.97%[12]. This means that in 2014 Minsk planned to spend about $710 million on national defence. But not all this money goes to the army. Only $640 million is allocated to the armed forces and for defence issues. The rest goes to several other activities that fall outside of the armed forces.

It should be mentioned that the government is allocating (in 2014) less money to defence than social welfare or cultural affairs and only slightly more than to its environmental protection programme budget. Of course, under these circumstances, Belarus cannot afford to purchase new equipment and proceed with the full-scale modernisation of its armed forces.

The World Bank, using data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), calculates that Belarusian military expenses made up an even smaller share of GDP (*see Table 1 below*). Moreover, Belarus spent less than neighbouring Poland and Ukraine on its army.

SIPRI has no interest in downplaying the available data. Indeed, Andrej Parotnikaŭ of the *Belarus Security Blog* believes that actual military expenditures are significantly lower than the SIPRIs data suggests. That makes SIPRIs information appear to be relatively convincing, particularly regarding its contention that Minsk possesses no significant ambitions in the military realm.

Table 1. Military expenditure (% of GDP) of Belarus, Poland and Ukraine[13] in 1992-2012



12 *BDG Delovaya Gazeta*, 2013. '"Bohataya" Belarus' uvelichivaet razkhody na zashchitu ot vragov', 22 November <http://bdg.by/news/finance/26837.html> [accessed 9 July 2014].

13 Military Expenditure (% of GDP), World Bank <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS> [accessed 20 April 2014].

As early as the autumn of 1996, Lukašenka claimed that Russia would help Belarus finance the protection of Belarusian borders from non-CIS nations[14]. However, Russian help has remained limited. In February 2012, Lukašenka asked Russia directly to help finance the Belarusian army.[15] The statement provoked controversy, prompting the Belarusian Defence Minister Jury Žadobin to explain that the words of his commander-in-chief were intended as an invitation to increase bilateral cooperation. The German magazine *Der Spiegel* took Lukašenka's words at face value and commented that Belarus is 'losing its autonomy step by step'.

In reality, Belarus does not need to maintain some components of its relatively sophisticated military (the only reason that it does so is to use it as a bargaining chip with Moscow). As Putin has stepped up military spending in recent years, the Belarusian leadership is itching to get its own share of the funding.

In previous years, Belarus has received some limited assistance in the military arena from Russia. First and foremost, this relates to the nation's defence infrastructure and specialised education and training. Even more importantly, Minsk has received indirect support for its military from Russia through generous oil subsidies that could be re-diverted to defence spending. But in the last few years Russia has reduced its oil subsidies. Both Minsk and Moscow need to find other ways to keep the Belarusian army afloat. Belarusian and Russian officials like to compare such financial aid to the Belarusian army with the US' aid to the Israeli and Egyptian militaries.

The salaries of Belarusian soldiers remain discouragingly low even after they rose last year. The *Belarus Security Blog* reported[16] last autumn the following average salaries:

Rank	Example	Salary
Non-Commissioned Officer	Technical specialist with 15 years in service	BYR 4.005.500 (around $400)
Captain	Company commander with 10 years in service	BYR 7.358.500 (around $730)
Lieutenant Colonel	Battalion commander with 25 years in service	BYR 9.538.500 (around $950)

Salaries are significantly lower than in the Russian army. In 2012, the Belarusian media publicly pointed out that a Belarusian lieutenant received six to seven times less than his counterpart in the Russian army.

Regime insiders also acknowledge that it is impossible to have a successful career by rising up the ranks in the army, since high official positions are reserved for people from the state security agencies (mostly the KGB) and the Presidential Security Service. In order to make a career in the army, a military officer would be better off applying for a job at one the state security agencies. Those who have served as a bodyguard to Lukašenka are almost guaranteed the rank of colonel and a sinecure afterwards.

Equipment and Supplies: Butter not Cannons

The Belarusian army possesses almost exclusively Soviet and post-Soviet (mostly Russian and some Ukrainian) weaponry and equipment. The only exception to this rule is the Chinese *Dongfeng Mengshi*. These are high mobility multi-purpose wheeled

14 Pazniak, Viačaslaŭ, 1998. 'Belarus in search of a security identity', in Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (eds.), *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, p. 167.

15 *Naviny.by*, 2012. 'Lukashenko prosit' u Medvedeva deneg dlia belorusskoy armii', 6 February <http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2012/02/06/ic_news_112_386383/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

16 *Belarus Security Blog*, 2013. 'Im platiat den'zhishchi – ogromnye tyshchi...', 24 October <http://www.bsblog.info/im-platyat-denzhishhi-ogromnye-tyshhi/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

vehicles. Minsk received these from Beijing as military assistance from China to Belarus in 2012.[17] In 2014, Belarus received some communication equipment from India too. Yet its overall quantity and financial value is negligible.

Nominally, Belarus possesses an impressive old Soviet armoury. Yet, it has acquired few modern arms after gaining its independence. As with many other assets of the Belarusian state, the real value of its armed forces is hard to measure. Officially, Belarus still has a significant stock of military equipment, but lacks the funding to modernise it. This is true even for prioritised segments of the military like the air force and air defence. According to former Defence Minister Paval Kazloŭski, only four or five of the 30 fighter planes in each of Belarus's Air Force regiments were combat-ready in 2010.[18] However, other experts such as Parotnikaŭ of the *Belarus Security Blog* assesses the battle readiness of fighter jets at about 60%.

In a rare moment of candidness about the nation's defence preparedness two years ago, Belarusian leader Aliaksandr Lukašenka admitted that the active lifetime of Belarusian military aircrafts is expiring. By early 2013 the air force decommissioned about 50 aircraft due to age. Yet, they have not been replaced. In addition to the remaining Soviet jets, the army has only ten slightly-newer second-hand L-39Cs. But, these are training, or light ground-attack aircraft.

Since the summer of 2009, Belarusian armed forces have lost seven pilots and four fighter jets and helicopters. Radio Liberty quoted a Belarusian air force pilot as saying: 'We still use Soviet machines that are twenty to thirty - and in some cases even forty - years old. The government has no money to renovate military equipment, so we intimidate [our enemies] with what we have'.

> With the exception of some minor arms and equipment transfers from Russia, Belarusian soldiers still use mostly Soviet era weaponry and equipment

Other parts of the Belarusian army are facing a similar situation with their arms and equipment. With the exception of some minor arms and equipment transfers from Russia, as well as small firearms which Belarus received through the structures of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO, ODKB in Russian), Belarusian soldiers still use mostly Soviet era weaponry and equipment.

Minsk, even with its recent growth in spending on its defence budget, still spends very little on its military. Moscow demands money for its weapons and prefers to deploy its own forces instead of rearming Belarus at Russia's expense. This diminishes Lukašenka's ability to use leverage, touting Belarus as a provider of security in negotiations with Russia.

Disarmament

On 4 January 2014, the Belarusian army deployed a third battery of the Tor-M2 short-range surface-to-air missile systems, weapons systems supplied to them by Russia[19]. This was no ordinary event, of course. The last time Russia supplied Belarus with a significant shipment of SAM (surface-to-air) systems was seven years ago.

Some newer equipment will reportedly arrive soon, such as four more divisions of the Russian long range surface-to-air missile systems, the S-300. Belarus also concluded with Russia a contract with Russia to purchase four Yak-130s, (an advanced jet trainer/

17 *Open.by*, 2012. 'Na vooruzhenie belorusskoy armii postupiat' kitayskie legkobronirovannye avtomobili', 20 June <http://www.open.by/country/82751> [accessed 9 July].

18 *Nashe Mnenie*, 2010. 'Belorusskaya armiya: problemy i koncepciya razvitiya', 30 November <http://nmnby.eu/news/discussions/2952.html> [accessed 9 July 2014].

19 The official web site of the Ministry of Defence of Republic of Belarus, 2014. 'Tretya batereya zenitnogo raketnogo kompleksa ''Tor-M2'' postupila na vooruzhenie VVS i voisk PVO Belarusi', 4 January <http://www.mil.by/ru/news/24226/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

and light attack aircraft).

And yet, this is a case of too little, too late and everything surrounding the issues is far from clear. Moscow has repeatedly delayed for years its promised delivery of supplying military hardware. The Belarusian army expected to get both of these SAM systems (the Tor and S-300) many years ago. While they are only now finally being delivered to Belarus, the Russian army is arming itself with an even newer line (the S-400s). Belarus is just replacing its old S-200s, and still has two batteries (*divizion*) of them in service.

In addition, whilst the Yak-130 may be modern, it is subsonic and cannot replace proper jets like the Su-27s that were decommissioned in 2012. Belarusian officials explained the decommissioning of the SU-27s by pointing out the small air space of the country.

Yet with an annual defence budget as in 2014 (about $640m) Minsk can hardly afford to buy new fighter jets like the Su-27 or Su-30 (which about $35-50m a piece). The Russian leadership has not helped Belarus by providing it with newer Russian aircraft. In September 2012, Lukašenka boasted after a meeting with Putin: 'We discussed many issues facing the air force. I asked for help and received it. Soon we will get new aircraft to guard our borders'.

If current trends of under-funding continue, the amred forces will gradually lose nearly all its advanced capabilities.

Putin, however, failed to deliver anything. Not even the 18 second-hand Su-30 jets, which were repaired in Baranavičy and which for a long time were rumoured to be transferred to Belarusian army have materialised. Moscow demanded hard currency for the Su-30s, pretending that it was interested only in money.

This turned out to be a farce. Soon after, Moscow sold the Su-30s to Angola, a country with an extremely poor credit history with Russia. It is still buying Russian weapons on credit.[20] Strange as it may seem, Moscow had to woo Angola. On the contrary, brotherly Belarus has (due to its international situation) no choice but to stay with Russia and Moscow does not provide any additional incentives.

If the current trend of under-funding continues, the armed forces will gradually lose nearly all its advanced capabilities. All of its tanks and machinery are useless without viable and effective air support. Minsk also needs advanced weapons and equipment to deal with new terrorist threats on the rise globally and in the post-Soviet region. The armed forces lack even less sophisticated equipment. In April 2014 it received communication and navigation equipment as a gift from India, yet this is a far cry from what is really needed.[21]

The discourse emanating from Minsk about optimising the size of the army hides the reality of its effective disarmament. It is shifting towards light aircraft, spending little on defence and relegating many of its own defence tasks to Russia. As a result, it is losing significance for Russia as a strategic partner in the military arena and will face political consequences as a result. Moreover, it undermines its own sovereignty in the process.

The Belarusian leadership apparently realises that danger and recently reversed its decision to decommission more aircraft. Recently on 30 January 2014, the Chairman of the Military Industrial Committee, Siarhej Hurulioŭ, proclaimed that the Belarusian

20 Alesin, Aleksandr, 2013. 'Okhranu neba nad Belarusiu Rossiya ne proch vzyat' v svoi ruki', *Naviny.by*, 4 November <http://news.tut.by/politics/373393.html> [accessed 9 July 2014].

21 BelTa, 2014. 'Indiya zainteresovana v dal'neishem pazviti sotrudnichestva c Belarusiu v oboronnoi sfere', 17 April <http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/politics/Indija-zainteresovana-v-dalnejshem-razvitii-sotrudnichestva-s-Belarusju-v-oboronnoj-sfere_i_666428.html> [accessed 9 July 2014].

defence industry managed to overhaul and modernise the decommissioned Su-27[22]. Lukašenka and Hurulioŭ have continued to discuss plans to modernise first the MiG-29 and Su-25, and then modernize and recommission some Su-27s.[23] These plans come with a large price tag, which may subsequently restrict or disrupt modernisation plans.

Lack of Offensive Capabilities

It is no wonder that whilst facing financial restraints, the Belarusian establishment lacks a particularly militaristic mood. The secretary of the parliament's National Security Commission Aliaksandr Miažujeŭ recently admitted:

> ...There is no military threat per se now, although NATO activity in neighbouring countries causes some concern. On the other hand, without any political and social destabilisation occurring inside the country, it is hardly possible to launch an armed conflict in it.

Major General Miažujeŭ also urged them to sort out social issues 'especially housing maintenance and utilities, housing construction, creating employment, etc'. He apparently spoke the words that Lukašenka had been waiting to hear. Shortly afterwards in December 2013, Miažujeŭ became State Secretary of the Security Council.[24]

On 21 February 2013, Aliaksandr Lukašenka said, 'Belarus and Russia are not going to threaten anyone'. Statistics on Belarusian and Russian forces show that they indeed pose no threat to Poland or any other country. Soviet strategy for a European war emphasised the role of tanks. Belarus has more tanks than any of European country westwards of it.

Of course, many of these machines are out of commission. According to Parotnikaŭ, there are no more than 400 tanks in service currently, although Alesin estimates their number to be more than 300. These tanks (inheritors of Soviet Union technology), have remained where the Soviet army left them. Belarus is capable of modernising them, yet has no money (and actually no need) to do so.

The Soviet Union's air force was always one of its weak spots. In the late stages of the Cold War, while Soviet fighter jets provided reasonable defence, Soviet aircrafts for close air support and bombers were, according to some military experts, inferior in comparison to their Western counterparts[25]. As for offensive air force capabilities, Belarus, after decommissioning the Su-24s in 2012, reportedly has only two dozen rather old, Soviet-era Su-25 aircrafts used for close air support for ground forces. It is likely that not all of them are functional. There may additionally be about two dozen of these aircraft in storage bases. But, their total number is unclear as not all sales of military aircrafts by Belarus (especially in the 1990s) were made public.

The only tangible offensive air force capability is, hypothetically, the four dozen

22 Ivinskaya, Darya, 2014. 'Belorusskiye istrebiteli Su-27 posle modernizacii poluchat vtoruyu zhizn', *Belnovosti*, 9 February <http://belnovosti.by/society/20968-belorusskie-istrebiteli-su-27-posle-modernizacii-poluchat-vtoruju-zhizn.html> [accessed 9 July 2014].

23 *Voenno-politechiskoe obozrenie*, 2014. 'Belarus' modernizuet svoi park boevykh samoletov', 10 April <http://www.belvpo.com/ru/36670.html> [accessed 9 July 2014]; and *Belarus Security Blog*, 2014. 'Polozhenie v oblasti nacionalnoy bezopasnosti i oborony (apriel 2014 goda)', 11 May <http://www.bsblog.info/polozhenie-v-oblasti-nacionalnoj-bezopasnosti-i-oborony-aprel-2014-goda/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

24 Bohdan, Siarhei, 2014. 'Alyaksandr Myazhuyeu - Fresh Faces Come to the Government?', *Belarus Digest,* 27 January <http://belarusdigest.com/story/alyaksandr-myazhuyeu-fresh-faces-come-government-16723> [accessed 9 July 2014].

25 Luttwak, Edward, 1980. *Strategy and Politics: Collected Essays*, Transaction Books: New Brunswick, London, pp. 11-13.

Mi-24 attack helicopters which the Belarusian army nominally possesses. But, they all are old and the number of effectively functioning Mi-24s is unknown.

The sheer numbers of troops also prove that Belarusian army alone or even together with the respective Russian forces do not pose any threat to the region. The Russian Western Military District forms, together with the Belarusian army, the Regional Group of Belarusian and Russian Troops. Yet the 20th Army of this District is smaller now after reforms than its famous in Soviet times for its Taman Division that stood there before the reforms. Some Russian equipment is newer than what Belarus uses yet the Russian army also needs modernisation.

Neither Belarus, nor Russia has any significant offensive military capabilities that can be deployed towards the West. Russia theoretically could bring some troops from other districts, yet it would dangerously expose itself in the Caucasus, Central Asia or the Far East where powerful competitors and real, rather than imaginary, radical forces that could destabilise Russian interests.

The Belarusian Military and International Entanglement

Nobody Wants a Neutral Belarus

Belarus proclaimed its neutrality as early as 1990, although its current Constitution more cautiously states that it just ‘aims to make the state neutral’ (Article 18). Moreover, in 1998 the country joined the Non-Alignment Movement which principally stipulates the neutrality of its member nations.

Nowadays almost no major group in the country is seriously committed to neutrality.

The leadership of the country has openly challenged the neutrality since the very beginning. The first leader of Belarus, Prime Minister Kiebič in 1992-1993 emphasised that given ‘Western Europe’s practice, it was doubtful that Belarus could become a neutral state in practice. Citing the examples of Finland, Austria, and Sweden as neutral countries that were reconsidering their positions, he came to the conclusion that Belarus’s neutrality option would prove counterproductive and could serve to isolate Belarus’.[26]

A member of the team of the newly-elected president (Lukašenka) in 1994 proclaimed, ‘from a security perspective it would be practical for Belarus to participate more actively in all security structures’.[27] Parliament speaker Miačyslaŭ Hryb elaborated more on the issue:

> ... In today’s world, state neutrality must be a neutrality of taking part in all available non-antagonistic alliances which do not stand against each other, it must be a neutrality of integration and mutual integration in all global and regional alliances and relations.[28]

Nowadays almost no major political group in the country is seriously committed to neutrality. The government openly promotes a military alliance with Russia. Most of

26 Rozanov, Anatolii, 1995. ‘Belarusian Perspectives on National Security and Belarusian Military Policy’, in Bruce Parrott, *State Building and Military Power in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, M.E.Sharpe: Armonk, New York, London, England, p. 196.

27 Cepkalo, Valerii, 1994. ‘Stremlenie Belarusi k neitralitetu ne zapreshaet ei ukrepliat’ mir vo vcem mire’, *Narodnaya gazeta*, 10-12 September.

28 Hryb, Miačaslaŭ, 1995. ‘Respublika Belarus u integracyjnym pracesie cucasnasci. Zajava Starsyni Viarchounaha Savieta Respubliki Belarus na 93-kanferencii Mizparlamenckaha Sajuza u Madrydzie’, *Zviazda*, 7 April.

the opposition loudly protests against such policies, but fails to commit to neutrality, but instead campaigns for an alliance with the West.

Sometimes, opposition politicians recall the neutrality principle. Yet, this is more lip service than real, earnest conviction. Thus, the chairman of the Party of the Belarusian People's Front (PBNF) Aliaksiej Janukievič insists that, 'the establishment of Russian military bases on Belarusian territory […] contradicts the national interests and the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus as a neutral state'.[29] Meanwhile, his party's programme reads, 'the PBNF believes that Belarus must join NATO'.[30]

Belarusian politicians articulate, raise and mention security issues also in other contexts. Both the Belarusian government and opposition use the politics of security (discussing seemingly unrelated issues in security terms) as a strategy to convince their respective foreign friends of their own importance. For years Lukašenka has resorted to security-related rhetoric such as 'Belarusians have always defended Moscow' to put pressure on the Russians each time they try to push him into a corner.

For their part, the Belarusian opposition like to emphasise that the regime's diplomatic games endangers the very future of the Belarusian nation. Opponents of the current government try to prove that Lukašenka is a threat to regional security, whether on his own or as a Russian stooge. Moreover, he has at times created mischief in distant lands (in the Middle East, Latin America and Africa), which also jeopardises Belarus' security. Some of this risk has materialised, but fortunately for Lukašenka, it has only appeared in the form of forged documents that describe Belarus supplying weapons to Pakistani terrorists and arming Sudan's government to kill Darfurians.[31]

The international community is also showing much more interest in Belarusian deals with Middle Eastern regimes than its dealings with other nations. Speaking in 2002 at a conference of the American Enterprise Institute, the future Polish foreign minister Radosław Sikorski warned that, 'the message from this conference to Lukašenka is: "President Lukašenka, be careful, because if your buddy in Baghdad gets thrown out, we will find the evidence of what you've been up to with him"'.[32] Despite this alarmist rhetoric, nothing particularly damning, of course, was ever found.

Belarusian and Russian Military Relations

Belarus' integration with Russia remains an issue that continues to be exaggerated in the Western media. As early as February 1994, Adrian Karatnycky wrote in a leading American magazine (*National Review*), 'Russia has virtually annexed Belarus by integrating the republic's economy and military into its own'.[33]

Others maintain that Belarus-Russian integration has proceeded primarily in the domain of their armed forces. Thus, Steven Main argued in 2002:

---

29 Belapan, 2013. 'Partyja BNF maje namier usimi dastupnymi niehvaltoŭnymi srodkami vystupać suprać razmiaščenija rasijskich zniščalnikaŭ u Bielarusi', 23 April <http://by.belapan.by/archive/2013/04/23/620093_620094/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

30 Prahrama Partyi BNF, pryniataja VIII-m Zjezdam Hramadskaha abjadniania BNF 'Adradzenie'. Uchvalenyja VI-m Zjezdam Partyi BNF, 1 December 2002 <http://narodny.org/?p=1116> [accessed 9 July 2014].

31 Read more here: Bohdan, Siarhei, 2013. 'Arms Trade Charges Against Belarus: Speculations and Facts', *Belarus Digest*, 13 March <http://belarusdigest.com/story/arms-trade-charges-against-belarus-speculations-and-facts-13320>; and Bohdan, Siarhei, 2013. 'Belarusian Military Cooperation With Developing Nations: Dangerous Yet Legal', Belarus Digest, 5 December <http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarusian-military-cooperation-developing-nations-dangerous-yet-legal-16322> [accessed 11 July 2014].

32 Mitchell, Lincoln, 2012. *The Color Revolutions*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 154.

33 Karatnycky, Adrian, 1994. 'Another Chance for NATO?', *National Review*, 7 February.

> ... Within a wider European foreign and security context, however, one of the most important aspects of the relationship between Russia and Belarus has been and continues to be the military aspect; it is in this area that the success of the move towards union has been most striking.[34]

In relative terms their success is remarkable. In contrast to the nearly complete stagnation found in legal, economic, political and other realms, their defence cooperation displays a certain level of real achievement. However, in absolute terms these achievements have failed to impress and should not be exaggerated.

In 1999-2000, the Belarusian and Russian governments agreed to establish the Regional Group of Belarusian and Russian troops. In the context of NATO expansion, Lukašenka proposed to establish a 300,000 strong joint military group[35]. It had to provide military security for Belarus and the adjoining Russian regions as well as Kaliningrad and would have to have the ability to move rapidly into the Baltic Sea.

But its establishment did not put Belarusian troops under Russian control. It was more a political move, with little substance and fewer real consequences for Minsk's military independence.[36]

More tangible signs of military integration (and not simply mere remnants of the Soviet era), appeared in the early 2010s. These were limited to some specific domains. In February 2012, Lukašenka approved an agreement with Russia to establish the Single Regional System of Air Defence. The defence ministers of the two nations had already signed the controversial treaty three years prior. The entire process of establishing the Single Regional System of Air Defence suffered many delays, demonstrating Minsk's ability to hold its ground against Moscow as well as use the agreement to negotiate on other non-military issues.[37]

In February 2012, Lukašenka approved an agreement with Russia to establish the Single Regional System of Air Defence.

Under the terms of their agreement, both Russian and Belarusian presidents would jointly appoint the commander of the air defence system. This effectively means that a portion of the Belarusian armed forces would be merged with the Russian military.

Interestingly, over the past two decades the Belarusian and Russian armies have actually witnessed a trend of increasing divergence, rather than the convergence that one might expect. Without a doubt, Minsk has continued to send its officers for advanced or specialised training in Russia. Still, Belarus is building a small army and its own territorial defence forces[38]. This could not be more different from Russia's own model, one which has a grand military tradition and great power ambitions.

Lukašenka was able to resist a larger Russian military presence in Belarus until 2013. He was finally made to accept an increased Russian presence and acquiesce at a rapid pace, whilst plausibly losing face. Russia has no real interest in having Lukašenka as an ally, particularly a military ally. Rather, the Kremlin is interested in making

---

34 Main, Steven, 2002. 'Geopolitics and Security: Belarusian-Russian Military Cooperation 1991-2002', in Ann Lewis (ed.), *The EU and Belarus, Between Moscow and Brussels*, London: Federal Trust for Education and Research, p. 229.

35 Solovev, Vladimir, 2000. 'Vladimir Putin nachal svoiu pervuyu posle izbraniya prezidentom zarubezhnuyu poezdku, Perviy kanal, 16 April <http://www.1tv.ru/news/health/104367> [accessed 9 July 2014].

36 Posolstvo Respubliki Belarus v Rossiyskoi Federacii, 'Regionalnaya gruppirovka voisk Belarusi i Rossii', <http://www.embassybel.ru/belarus-russia-relations/military/e5c10e1ff1a0.html> [accessed 9 July 2014].

37 Alesin, Aleksandr, 2008. 'Otklad – ne v lad', *Belarusy i Rynok*, 49 (833), 8 - 15 December <http://www.br.minsk.by/index.php?article=34175> [accessed 9 July 2014].

38 Melyantsou, Dzianis, 2007. 'Abaronnyya systemy Litvy i Bielarusi: paraŭnalny analiz', *Palityčnaja Sfera*, 9, p. 97.

Lukašenka a servile vassal. It has clamped down on one of Belarus' most lucrative profit generating schemes where it re-exports Russian oil to foreign markets, after reprocessing it at Belarusian refineries, and has regularly subjected Lukašenka other forms of pressure.

The Belarusian leader started complaining about Russia's uncooperative stance as early as 2010. Back then he lamented having to buy weapons at market price. He underscored that for Belarus defending the 'brotherly state' was 'beneficial, even an issue of image'.[39]

Indeed, for years the Belarusian army bought weapons from Russia on favourable terms and at discounted prices. In 2006, Belarus received four surface-to-air missile batteries (*divizion*) (S-300s) for $13 million a piece. Did Minsk receive a large discount, given the price Russia charges other countries for the S-300 (currently, about $115-180 million a battery)? Hardly – and what's worse, the S-300 were not new. They had earlier been used by the Russian army. Although Minsk benefited from the bargain in the end, it gained less than it may seem at first glance. More recently, Russia has flat out refused to give Belarus even second-hand weapons.

One such example of Russia's reluctance to help the Belarusian government stands out in particular. This concerns 18 Su-30K fighter jets which for two years have been stationed at the Belarusian Baranavičy Aircraft Repair Plant. Russia sold the jets to India in the late 1990s, and in 2008 the Indians returned them to Russia in exchange for a newer type of Russian aircraft. The media and analysts surmised that the shipment of second-hand jets would be handed over to Minsk.

> The Belarusian government has few if any choices to modernise its armed forces as it has no money for new equipment and Moscow is providing it with few arms for free or at a reasonable discount price

Yet, Belarus could not come up with the necessary $270 million to pay for them. It tried to organise a loan from the Russian Finance Ministry, but to no avail. Finally, in June 2013, the Russian RIA Novosti news agency reported that the jets would probably make their way to Ethiopia. In October, however, the aircrafts were reportedly sold to Angola. Given the history of Russian relations with these African countries, nations who are burdened with numerous prior unpaid debts, it can hardly be argued that Moscow preferred the deal it made for financial reasons.

With regards to its military, the Belarusian government has few if any choices to modernise its armed forces as it has no money for new equipment and Moscow is providing it with fewer and fewer arms for free or at a reasonable discount rate. Military analyst Aleksandr Alesin concluded after reviewing statements on *naviny.by* from the Russian defence minister that most likely Moscow has at long last been persuaded to give new arms to Minsk. These armaments include four divisions of the S-300 air defence system and finally upgrade the country's delapidated air defence systems to a minimally acceptable level. All of this, of course, came at a cost. Minsk had to agree to hosting a Russian air force base inside its borders.

The timetable seems perfect for the project, with both the Belarusian and Russian sides preparing to exchange favours. Belarus received its first Russian fighter jets in 2013, and next year Moscow will provide Minsk with the promised S-300s, and in 2015, as a final stage of this deal, a full-fledged Russian base will begin to function in Belarus.

In 2011-2012, Belarus received from Russia two divisions of the short-range surface-to-air missile system Tor M2E. The Tor systems are a substitute for the S-300s, which provide mid- and long-range defence. Both systems are necessary to protect the nation's airspace and territory at multiple levels. Minsk, it would seem, apparently had

39 Charnysh, Volha, 2012. 'Belarus Needs an Enemy', *Belarus Digest*, 8 January <http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarus-needs-enemy-7264> [accessed 9 July 2014].

hoped that Moscow would take even more interest in Belarus' air defence systems.

After all, Belarusian airspace is of real strategic importance to Russia. The Belarusians are guarding hundreds of kilometres of airspace adjacent to the Russian capital. The Belarusian government publicised the delivery of Tors as a good omen. Yet, what followed was little more than a business transaction on behalf of the Russian defence industry.

Vladimir Putin outlined the development of the Russian army as one of the priorities of his third presidential term. The military-industrial complex will benefit the most from his new policy direction. Belarusian weapons manufacturers would have been happy with the Kremlin's decision if the Russian military had not chosen to use other foreign manufacturers – a move which closed the door on Belarusian exporters.

Russia has disrupted military-related cooperation with Belarus in other fields as well. The Kremlin recently decided to end its dependency on other countries in producing military equipment and Belarus was no exception to this rule. In 2012, Russia revealed its plans to stop buying Belarusian MZKT trucks for its mobile rocket systems[40]. MZKT has for decades provided heavy trucks with strategic missiles systems, surface-to-air missiles systems and multiple rocket launchers[41]. Although Moscow does not have a proper equivalent to them, it is sticking to this decision, a move that proves that their decision is an entirely political one.[42] At the same time, Russian companies have demonstrated an interest in buying the MZKT factory.

It seems very likely that Russia will further reduce its purchases of Belarusian military manufactured goods as well. If they do, it will deal a massive blow to Belarusian defence industries. In this way Russia is striving to obtain further control over the Belarusian army and its defence industries.

The Russian government is currently treating Minsk harshly. Belarusian isolation from the West has taken away from Lukašenka most of his ability to leverage with Belarus' main partner, a position he had long enjoyed in his dealings with Moscow. So far the pressure on the Belarusian regime from the West has failed to democratise Belarus, resulting in Lukašenka accepting something that is anathema to him, namely a new Russian military base in Belarus.

Role of the Belarusian Army in Belarus-Russian Relations

Referring in February 2012 to the recent unrest in North Africa, Syria, and Iran, Defence Minister Žadobin declared that, 'external factors are drawing our attention to the military dimensions of state security'. Žadobin may have implied that Belarus should be vigilant because its neighbours were willing to teach it 'how to live'.[43] With Russia as Belarus' closest ally and hardly anyone in the Belarusian army being able to imagine a war against NATO, what was Žadobin referring to? Is there another external threat posed by a nation in the region that he did not mention directly - Russia perhaps?

Belarus needs its armed forces to be perceived by Russia as a valuable asset for its own national defence.

40 *Lenta.ru*, 2012. 'Minoborony peresadit armiyu c minskikh na rossiyskie shassi, 10 September, <http://lenta.ru/news/2012/09/10/carriage/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

41 Lavnikevich, Denis, 2012. 'Na belaruskikh kolesakh', *Belarus Security Blog*, 25 September, <http://www.bsblog.info/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

42 Lavnikevich, Denis, 2013. 'MZKT ochen nuzhen rossiyskomu voenpromu', *BDG Delovaya gazeta*, 5 April, <http://bdg.by/news/bussiness/21633.html>; Interfax.by, 2013. 'Belarusskie vlasti opasajutsa prodavat MZKT KamAZu', 10 April <http://www.interfax.by/news/belarus/1128337> [accessed 9 July 2014].

43 *Open.by*, 2012. 'Ministr oborony Belarusi Yuri Zhadobin: "K sozhaleniu, vse pochemu-to schitayut neobkhodimym nauchit nas zhit, vystavit nam te ili inye uslovia"', 21 February <http://www.news.open.by/politics/74106> [accessed 10 July 2014].

Military analyst Aleksandr Alesin and other experts believe that Belarus itself does not need such a formidable military in the first place. Yet, as Russia's staunch ally, Belarus needs its armed forces to be perceived by Russia as a valuable asset for its own national defence. Indeed, only 300 km separate the Belarusian border from the Kremlin. National defence is the trump card of the Belarusian government in nearly all of its negotiations with Russia.

Indeed, the new Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation that was signed into law on 5 February 2010 and is effective for the Russian military through 2020, discusses Belarusian security as well. According to this document, Russia:

> ... considers an armed attack on a state-participant of the Union State [of Belarus and Russia], as well as all other actions involving the use of military force against it, as an act of aggression against the Union State, and it will take appropriate measures in response.[44]

The new doctrine sets Russia's priorities in its military-political cooperation with Belarus:
1. The coordination of efforts in developing national armed forces and use of its military infrastructure;
2. The development and coordination of measures for maintaining the defence capabilities of the Union State in accordance with the Military Doctrine of the Union State.

The doctrine identifies NATO expansion as the very first issue in a list of major external threats to Russia. In this context, the role of the Belarusian army is elevated. Taking into account the actual policy of Russia towards Belarus in the defence field, there are, however, doubts as to whether the Russian government uses this doctrine more for internal political use, rather than to define its actual policies. Moscow not only displays little willingness to resupply the Belarusian army with newer equipment, but it also plays rough with Minsk in other arenas. Thus, Gazprom has repeatedly charged Belarus full price for Russian gas, ignoring its special ally status.[45]

The military sites that Russia has in Belarus have been openly used in political disputes between Minsk and Moscow. They were mentioned frequently during the so-called 'gas wars' with Russia. In 2003, Lukašenka at one point even hinted at possibly turning off electricity to Russia's Volga radar station in Belarus. However, after representatives of the Russian Central Election Commission supported the outcome of Belarus' 2010 presidential election, the Belarusian leadership said that the Russian military site would continue to function rent-free and the conflict was set aside.

Lukašenka has repeatedly declared that a discounted price for gas, oil and other economic benefits from Russia were the price Russia paid for its alliance with Belarus and for Belarusian collaboration, especially in the military field. According to Lukašenka, considering everything that Belarus does for Russia, Russia owes Belarus more than Belarus owes Russia.

Lukašenka often points out that the Belarusian armed forces are shielding Central Russia from NATO and emphasises the role of Belarusian air defence forces in protecting Moscow and the importance of Russian military sites in Belarus for Russian security.

In April 2010 after Russia and Ukraine had concluded an agreement extending the Russian Black Sea Fleet's stay in Crimea, Lukašenka stated that Russia had paid Ukraine about $40 billion for the base which had less importance for Russia than the

44 The official web site of the President of the Russian Federation, 2010. 'Voennaya dokrina Rossiyiskoi Federacii', 5 February <http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/461> [accessed 10 July 2014].
45 For detailed analysis of this case see: Vietor, Marcel, 2009. *Russian Foreign Policy between Security and Economics: Exporting Gas and Arms to Belarus and China 1990-2008*, Berlin: Lit Verlag, p.112.

Russian military facilities in Hancavičy and Vilejka.

Belarus' importance to Russia rises or diminishes depending on Russia's relations with NATO. Belarus importance, however, should not be exaggerated. Thus far the ongoing confrontation with NATO remains mostly in the realm of diplomacy. It does not influence the overall actual military balance in the region.

For instance, after talks between America and Russia in autumn 2011 on the deployment of missile defence facilities in eastern NATO members stalled, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev underscored that Moscow could not accept the weakening of Russia's deterrent capabilities. They were even prepared to take special measures. In 2011 - 2012 Russian media repeatedly cited anonymous sources from the Russian and Belarusian governments on plans to deploy the Russian missile system Iskander in Belarus and in the Kaliningrad Province of Russia.[46]

The Belarusian leadership immediately took the opportunity to request money from the Kremlin. On 6 February 2012, Lukašenka stated, 'I sent a letter to Medvedev about the necessity of looking for additional funding for the Belarusian military… The two countries have basically a single army and similar tasks that they are facing'.

A couple of days later Defence Minister Jury Žadobin explained:

> ... Military cooperation between our countries could become one of the arguments for receiving preferences in economic matters, for example, with regards to oil and gas supplies, which could be used to increase the national budget funds and augment our military men's money allowances.

Minsk, however, lost the game. At the time, Moscow was definitely not about to launch a new cold war with NATO. Therefore it did not consider the need for Iskanders in Belarus in earnest.

A Growing Russian Military Presence

At the moment Russia has two military facilities in Belarus. Moscow emphasises that these are not 'bases', just *obyekty*, (facilities or sites). In the north-western town of Vilejka, the 43rd Communications Centre of the Russian Navy has been functioning since 1964. Reportedly the facility accommodates 350 commissioned and warrant naval officers.[47]

In the southern town of Hancavičy there is an early warning radar of the Russian Airspace Defence Forces which has been in commission since 2002. At this site there are around 2,000 Russian troops stationed. The presence of Russian troops in Belarus remains significantly lower than in other countries of the former Soviet Union, say, in Ukraine, Georgia or Armenia.[48]

Despite his loud rhetoric about integration with Russia, Lukašenka has so far managed to limit Russian military access to Belarusian territory. The two military facilities mentioned were established by a treaty signed in January 1995. It means that preparatory work for the treaty took place before Lukašenka had established his authoritarian rule over the young nation and, more precisely, even before he became president. Moreover, the Vilejka facility existed long before Belarus became an

46 *Telegraf.by*, 2011. 'Rossiya mozhet pasmestit v Belorusi ''Iskandery''', 22 November <http://telegraf.by/2011/11/rossiya-mojet-razmestit-v-belarusi-iskanderi> [accessed 10 July 2014].

47 Solonec, Grigorii, 2005. 'Glaza i ushi BMF', *Rossiyjskaya gazeta*, 27 October <http://www.rg.ru/2005/10/27/antey.html> [accessed 10 July 2014].

48 Ria Novosti, 2010. 'Voennye bazy RF za granicei. Spravka', 15 February <http://ria.ru/spravka/20100215/209344182.html> [accessed 10 July 2014].

independent state.

The only breakthrough that Russia has had with regards to military integration with Belarus under Lukašenka has been the creation of the Single Regional System of Air Defence. This project was delayed many for a period of many years by Lukašenka. Part of this is due to the fact that Moscow needed it much more than Minsk did.

Belarus and Russia negotiated for years over forming a Single Air Defence System to guard the common borders of the so-called Union State of Belarus and Russia.[49] The appropriate agreement was signed in February 2009 and Russia ratified the document in December 2009. Yet, Lukašenka confirmed it by edict only three years later (February 2012).This was not the end of the bargaining process. A discussion about who should be in command of the system soon followed. Minsk won and in August 2013 the commander of the Belarusian Air Force and Air Defence Aleh Dvihalioŭ was appointed the commander of the Single Air Defence System.

The First Russian Military Base

For the first time, in Autumn 1995 the Russian general staff articulated its plans to put in the event of NATO enlargement, a major Russian military force on the Polish and Lithuanian borders. Yet, Lukašenka did not accept this. The then defence minister Malcaŭ called the idea 'complicated'.

> The situation regarding Russian military presence in the country changed in 2013, when Russian minister Sergei Shoigu discussed with Lukašenka the establishment of a Russian air force base in Belarus

The situation regarding Russian military presence in the country changed in 2013, when in April Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu discussed with Aliaksandr Lukašenka the establishment of a Russian air force base in Belarus. A few days later, Lukašenka dismissed claims that Russia would have a military base in Belarus.

The story surrounding the Russian air force base at first looked like it would have a decidedly different conclusion. While the initial plans were still under discussion, the Russians articulated their intentions to establish a base. Lukašenka refuted them and the Belarusian officials insisted that negotiations were concerned only with supplying the Belarusian armed forces with new aircraft. Soon thereafter, by late May, Minsk (without much enthusiasm) confirmed the original Russian plan was being carried out.

The Russian air force base still lacks a legislative and normative framework for its existence. Žadobin admitted this and added that this framework was to be prepared in 2013 and 2014. A fully operational base should exist by 2015. Only Moscow dictating its terms could plausibly explain such a smooth implementation of the plans by the Belarusian government this time around. The rapid pace of implementing these agreements has no precedent in Belarusian-Russian military relations. Especially when compared to the delays in establishing the Single Air Defence System. This time, however, Moscow forcefully and effectively imposed its will on Lukašenka.

On 8 December 2013, the first of four Russian interceptor jets (Su-27Ps)[50] arrived at Baranavičy (despite previous reports about plans of them being deployed to Lida). Instead of the earlier discussed new Su-30s, Moscow dispatched to Belarus their technological predecessors (Su-27s). A military analyst, Aleksandr Alesin commented on European Radio for Belarus: 'that is a complete analogue to what is going on

49 Alesin, Aleksandr, 2008. 'Otklad – ne v lad', *Belarusy i Rynok*, 49 (833), 8 - 15 December <http://www.br.minsk.by/index.php?article=34175> [accessed 10 July 2014].

50 Alesin, Aleksandr, 2013. 'Moskva narashchivaet voennoe prisutstve v Belarusi', *Naviny.by*, 23 December <http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2013/12/23/ic_articles_112_184036/> [accessed 10 July 2014].

at the air force base in [Lithuanian] Šiauliai where NATO's fighter jets are on alert duty'. Indeed, Baranavičy lies westwards of Minsk and is equidistant to the Polish and Lithuanian borders.

On 13 March 2014, the media reported that six more Su-27s and three military transport aircrafts from the Russian air force, accompanied by technicians, had arrived at the Babrujsk airfield[51] On 17 March the Supreme Commander of Russia's Air Force, Lieutenant General Viktor Bondarev, told the ITAR-TASS news agency that there was already a flight of four Su-27SM3s regularly being deployed in Belarus. Moreover, by the end of the year Moscow purportedly plans to deploy (to Baranavičy) a regiment of Su-27SM3 (two squadrons, or 24 aircrafts).[52]

In early June, additional Russian aircraft that was deployed to Babrujsk and Baranavičy returned to Russia[53]. The available media reports created a confusing picture about the types of aircrafts and their numbers, as well as the nature of Russia's air force presence in Babrujsk and Baranavičy. One thing is clear - the temporary deployment of Russian aircraft in Belarus is combined with the process of establishing Russia's first air force base (likely to be based in Lida).

The first Russian base changes the nature of the two nations' bilateral relations. The Belarusian government cultivated for years the image of the Belarusian army defending the Russian capital. Lukašenka relied on this image in his disputes with the Kremlin and, in a way, used it to maintain his own popularity with Russia. The loss of this image would seriously undermine Lukašenka's position in his dealings with Russia, so he initially resisted the Kremlin's proposals to deploy Russian forces in Belarus.

Belarusian military expert Aleksandr Alesin predicted that 'as the ability of the national air force for battle diminishes, the air space of Belarus will be increasingly guarded by Russian military pilots'. Minsk accepted the Russian takeover of some of its air defence duties, only as the technical problems facing the Belarusian armed forces became too conspicuous and costly to deal with. Belarus has been losing its capacity to control its own air space and the Kremlin has, as previously noted, refused to grant modern arms to its closest ally. Thus Lukašenka has come to accept something he refused to do for years i.e. grant the creation of a Russian military base on Belarus soil. He also gained at least a few surface-to-air missile systems and jets. In August 2013, Belarusian Defence Minister Jury Žadobin effectively admitted that Belarus did not have enough aircraft and so had to host a Russian air base.

> Belarus lacks the necessary equipment to guarantee the security of its own air space. Since 2012 any unauthorised or hostile breach of Belarus' air space is a breach of Russia's own defences as well.

Belarus lacks the necessary equipment to guarantee the security of its own air space. In 2012, it established the Single Regional System of Air Defence with Russia, which formally means that now any unauthorised or hostile breach of Belarus' air space is a breach of Russia's own defences as well.

In December 2012 Belarus offered the services of its last functioning Su-27 fighter jets. The Belarusian daily *Ezhednevnik* wrote that it amounted to a 'loss of almost a third of the fighter fleet of the Belarusian air force'.[54] It dangerously thinned out its air defence forces in the vicinity of vital Russian economic and political centres like

51 *Telegraf.by*, 2014. 'Belarus obsudit partnerstvo c NATO', 20 March <http://telegraf.by/2014/03/belarus-obsudit-partnerstvo-s-nato> [accessed 10 July 2014].

52 *Vzgliad Delovaya Gazeta*, 2014. 'Glavkom VVS: Rossiya pazmestit v Belorussii 24 istrebitelia Su-27CM3', 17 March <http://www.vz.ru/news/2014/3/17/677498.html> [accessed 10 July 2014].

53 *Naša Niva*, 2014. 'Rasijskija zniščalniki pakinuli Bielarus'', 5 June <http://nn.by/?c=ar&i=129704> [accessed 10 July 2014].

54 *Ezhednevnik*, 2012. 'Belarus vyvela iz sostava VVS 14 Su-27 9 poluchila vzamen 4 Yak-130', 18 December <http://www.ej.by/news/sociaty/2012/12/18/belarus__vyvela_iz_sostava_vvs_14_su-27_i_poluchila_vzamen_4__yak-130.html> [accessed 10 July 2014].

Moscow. It is no wonder then that the Kremlin hurried to deploy its own air force to Belarus.

Joint Military Exercises: Fighting for Russian Funding

Alongside Russian military facilities, another visible aspect of Belarus-Russian military integration involves military exercises. The majority of attention is usually given to military exercises, training and war games like '*Zapad*'. These military exercises were held in Belarus by the Soviet Union since 1973. Soviet '*Zapad*' drills demonstrated the Soviet's military might to NATO. The name still remains symbolic.

In 1999, in the midst of its confrontation with NATO over Yugoslavia, Russia revived the tradition of holding '*Zapad*' military exercises. Belarus, however, has only participated in these drills since 2009. The *Zapad-2009* was the first big exercise and caused various reactions. Poland's foreign minister Radosław Sikorski urged America to deploy troops to Poland to defend it from military aggression. Sikorski over-enthusiastically exclaimed, 'there are 900 [Belarusian] tanks on one side and only six [US] soldiers on the other [Polish side]. Could you be calm in this situation?'[55]

Such a reaction might have been provoked by the US' decision not to deploy an anti-missile system to Poland. President Obama renounced these plans some weeks prior to the military exercises. And thus ended the hopes of Polish political elites to increase the strategic significance of Poland for Washington and NATO.

At the *Zapad-2009* exercises the presidents of Belarus and Russia agreed to hold similar joint drills every two years.[56] Indeed, in 2011 Belarusian and Russian militaries carried out exercises called *Shchyt Sayuza-2009* (Union's Shield). In September 2013, the routine joint Belarusian-Russian military exercise *Zapad-2013* took place in Belarus and in the Kaliningrad Province of Russia. The Russian and Belarusian presidents watched the exercises and Belarusian state media used the mutual Russian-Belarusian training to emphasise the might of the Belarusian military.

A NATO spokesperson officially expressed concern about the Russian-Belarusian exercises, noting that they were 'the largest since the end of the Cold War', saying that Russia's failure to invite observers to them could be considered a violation of the Vienna accords. Belarusian and Russian officials insisted that the *Zapad-2013* drill did not threaten anyone and reminded NATO that last year it had conducted a dozen drills of various sizes in neighbouring countries.

10,000 Belarusian and 12,000 Russian troops took part in the six-day military exercises in 2013. At first glance it looked larger than the previous exercise that took place back in 2009 (*see Table 2 below*). But only 2,520 Russian military personnel took part in the exercises in Belarus. The rest of the Russian army were deployed in Russia. Some military units from Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan also took part in the exercises (participation of the latter two countries was symbolic in nature with only a few staff officers participating).[57]

---

55 *Belarus Digest,* 2009. 'Russian-Belarusian exercises made Poland ask for help from US', 5 November <http://belarusdigest.com/2009/11/05/1423> [accessed 10 July 2014].

56 Kuz'min, Vladimir, 2009. 'Oborona Zapada Rossiya i Belorussiya dogovorilis provodit sovmestnye ucheniya raz v dva goda', *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 30 September <http://www.rg.ru/2009/09/30/zapad.html> [access 10 July 2014].

57 Gavrilov, Yurii, 2013. 'Prikaz: na ''Zapad''. Shchyt Sojuza proveriayut na prochnost', *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 23 September <http://www.rg.ru/2013/09/20/zapad-2013-site.html> [accessed 10 July 2014].

Table 2: Joint Military Exercises

Exercise	*Major Participants*	*Minor Participants*	*Participation of Belarusian Troops*	*Participation of Russian Troops*	*Place of Exercise*
Zapad-2013 (operative-strategic drill) combined with anti-terror drill of the CSTO (*ODKB*)	Belarus, Russia	Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan	10,000	12,000	Belarus and Russia
Shchyt Sayuza-2011 (operative-tactic drill)	Belarus, Russia	Ukraine	5,000	7,000	Russia
Zapad-2009 (operative-strategic drill)	Belarus, Russia	Kazakhstan	6,500	6000	Belarus and Russia
Shchyt Sayuza-2006 (operative-tactic drill)	Belarus, Russia	None	7,000	1,800	Belarus

In the 2011 military exercises, which occurred only in Russia, 6,000 Belarusian and Russian troops took part.[58] In *'Zapad-2009'* in Belarus and Western Russia, 12,500 troops participated (6,500 from Belarus and 6,000 from Russia), as well as a small contingent of Kazakh soldiers.[59] In the Belarusian-Russian military exercises in 2006 around 8,800 soldiers participated (7,000 Belarusian troops and 1,800 Russian military personnel).[60]

Belarusian and foreign media talked about a 'Syrian scenario' of military exercises as if Belarus would have trained for the suppression of an uprising by the Polish minority

In 2013, there was a remarkable rise in the numbers of troops participating. Yet, at the same time it was unusual. First of all, the military exercises appeared to be rather unimpressive in comparison to the July 2013 Russian military exercise in its Eastern military district where 160,000 troops were deployed.[61]

Secondly, the military exercise (*Zapad-2013*) for the first time included smaller military exercises held by the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO or *ODKB*).[62] Rapid deployment forces from CSTO member states had their own tasks. As military analyst Aleksandr Alesin noted, the point of holding both exercises together was to save money and to improve coordination between their respective staffs.

A couple of years earlier, after a coup in Kyrgyzstan, Lukašenka said that the CSTO should deploy its special forces to crush any possible revolutions in the post-Soviet states. While the idea was not pursued in this CSTO exercise, according to the Belarusian Defence Ministry, 'the joint forces will isolate and exterminate extremist

58 *Vesti*, 2011. 'V sentiabrie Rossiya i Belorussiya provedut uchenia ''Shchyt Sojuza – 2011''', 20 April <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=446746> [accessed 10 July 2014].

59 Stroev, Igor, 2009. '''Zapad-2009'': gotownost nomer odin! Zavtra v Belorusi nachinaetsa masshtabnoe voennoe uchenie', *Rossiyskaya gazeta* <http://www.rg.ru/2009/09/17/ucheniya.html> [accessed 10 July 2014].

60 *Pravda*, 2006. '''Shchyt Sojuza - 2006'' vstupil v zavershayushchuyu stadiu', 22 June <http://www.pravda.ru/districts/northwest/kaliningrad/22-06-2006/88572-exer-0/> [accessed 10 July 2014].

61 Sladkov, Aleksandr, 2013. 'Ucheniya na Dalnem Vostoke podkhodiat k koncu', *Vesti*, 18 July <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1107074&tid=104074> [accessed 10 July 2014]; *Vesti*, 2013. 'V masshtabnoi proverke uchastvovali voiska ot Sibiri do Sakhalina', 27 July http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1110644&tid=104074 [accessed 10 July 2014]; Aleksei Baranov, 2013. '''Glavnye manevry: na Dalnem Vostoke prokhodiat samye masshtabnye uchenia v istorii Rossii', *Vesti*, 16 July <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1106540&tid=104074> [accessed 10 July 2014].

62 The web site of the Organisation of Collective Security Agreement, 'Uchenia KSOR ODKB ''Vzaimodeistvie-2013'' proidut v Belarusi s 20 po 25 sentiabria', 13 September 2013 <http://odkb-csto.org/news/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=2655&SECTION_ID=91> [accessed 10 July 2014].

forces which might have entered from a neighbouring country to launch an internal conflict in Belarus'.

Belarusian and foreign media, in particular Radio Liberty/Free Europe, spoke about a 'Syrian scenario' of military exercises as if Belarus would have trained for the suppression of an uprising by the Polish minority in one of the country's western regions. Meanwhile, many journalists did not mention that the 'extermination of extremist forces' as it was a component of only one section of the military exercises.

Moreover, that part belonged to the domain of the CSTO. This organisation has more concerns about Central Asia and a potential Taliban takeover of Afghanistan with possible spillover of extremist militancy into Central Asia.[63]

Of course, some Polish politicians (like former defence minister Romuald Szeremietiew), as early as January 2013 claimed that the Belarusian-Russian military exercise had been planned to prepare for a possible conflict with Poland after a hypothetical uprising of the Polish national minority in Belarus. But, one should consider these kinds of statements in the context of attempts by the Polish military and defence industries to make the government change its plans for defence cuts.

Exceedingly unhelpful comments from some neighbouring countries accompanied news about Belarus-Russian military exercises, especially in 2013. They implied that the Belarusian government together with Russia is a source of instability in the region.

So, *Polska Times Daily* even speculated that in the autumn 2013 military drill, Belarus and Russia might even practise preparing for a nuclear strike on Warsaw, referring as argumentation to some aspects of previous *Zapad* military exercises.[64]

These obsessive thoughts were not limited to Poland. Although neighbouring Baltic states remained more reserved, the deputy chief of staff of the Estonian army told *Eesti Päevaleht* (a major Estonian daily) that he is concerned about the scale of military exercises, as Russia's military power has significantly more weighted towards the West. Apparently, he did not mean Belarusian forces, but rather just the Russian part of the exercises. Regardless, Belarus has at its disposal no serious offensive capabilities. The joint military exercises could be counted as a real demonstration of its humble military might. Still, the head of the Latvian counterintelligence agency Jānis Kažociņš claimed, 'the military exercises West-2013 are an attempt to cut off the Baltic countries from EU and NATO help'.[65] He continued to warn of Russian plans to block the Baltic Sea using nuclear weapons.

This rhetoric from the West also stimulates the Russian leadership to continue supporting the Belarusian regime which in their eyes stands in confrontation to the West

Such rhetoric is highly useful for the Belarusian leadership. Minsk wants to prove that Belarus is threatened and nothing has changed since (for example) 1939 when Poland suppressed the Western Belarusian population and talked of retaking Eastern Belarus. Official propaganda in Belarus would gratefully discuss troops and missiles with Warsaw, Riga or Vilnius instead of human rights or elections.

This rhetoric from the West also stimulates the Russian leadership to continue

63 See, for instace, an interview with CSTO General Mikhail Bordyuzha given to the official Belarusian daily *Belarus' Segodnya*, 2013. 'Kollektivnaya bezopasnost',170 (24307), 11 September <http://www.sb.by/post/152634/> [accessed 10 July 2014].

64 Koziński, Agaton, 2013. 'Manewry Zapad 2013: Rosja i Białoruś przećwiczy prewencyjny atak jądrowy na Warszawę. A NATO?'', *Polska The Times*, 2 April <http://www.polskatimes.pl/artykul/796327,manewry-zapad-2013-rosja-i-bialorus-przecwiczy-prewencyjny-atak-jadrowy-na-warszawe-a-nato,id,t.html?cookie=1> [accessed 10 July 2014].

65 *RIA Regnum*, 2013. 'Ukhodiashchii glava latviiskoi kontrrazvedki predupredil, shto Rossiya khotet vernut sebe Latviyu', 29 April <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1654250.html> [accessed 10 July 2014].

supporting the Belarusian regime which, in their eyes, is in a confrontation with the West. The image of an anti-Western dictator remains Lukašenka's main selling point for the Russians. The Belarusian opposition failed to neutralise these odd speculations about Lukašenka being a fighter against the West, and mostly chose to support them. During 1 May festivities a group of opposition activists in Brest came out with a slogan 'Today a Russian Base = Tomorrow 22nd June'. The latter part of the comment refers to the day of the beginning of the 1941 German invasion. It is hard to find a more unsuitable slogan for a society deeply traumatised by World War II.

Risk of Proxy Confrontation of Russia and NATO in Belarus

Lukašenka has very good reasons for avoiding a larger Russian military presence in Belarus. On one hand, having effectively no own soldiers on Belarusian soil, Russia cannot directly threaten Minsk. Even in the unlikely, but still plausible, event of a political emergency in Belarus, Russia would find it difficult to quickly mobilise forces in Belarus. On the other, by restricting or even allowing for increased Russian military activity, Minsk positions itself to make more gestures towards the EU. This allows Belarus to play Brussels and Moscow off against each another and provides Lukašenka with some space to forge a path between the two. However, the EU remains critical and dismissive of Lukašenka. Through his manoeuvring, he wishes to show Brussels how dangerous it is for the Europeans not to take him seriously.

Additionally, both Moscow and Minsk now perceive that the regional military balance is putting them at more and more of a disadvantage. NATO fighter planes are present in Lithuania, since 2006 Poland has F-16 fighter jets in its arsenal and from 2010 it has also acquired Patriot surface-to-air missile systems. Moreover, after the Ukrainian crisis erupted, America deployed 12 F-16 fighters to Poland. Officials of both Belarus and Russia have discussed the deployment of American troops in Poland.[66]

In its military survey of 2013 the Russian *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* admitted that Belarusian army formations are in much better shape than Russian army units deployed in Western Russia. Yet, the journalist goes on to state that, 'while the Russian army, after adopting two years ago the State Armaments Programme, started to receive the latest equipment, the same can hardly be said for the Belarusian military'. The Belarusian leader agrees with this synopsis. Thus, dismissing the news of a Russian base in spring 2013 Lukašenka said that 'two dozen modern jets' back him 'as supreme commander'.

However, making noise about acquiring additional S-300 makes little sense. Minsk clearly is not exceeding the real needs of its national security forces.

Polish criticism of the deployment of additional S-300s in Belarus would appear to be rather insincere as Warsaw has since 2010 been deploying Patriot missiles, an American equivalent of the S-300, which according to some analysts may be superior to its Russian counterpart.

Moreover, Belarus wants to get four S-300 batteries (*divizion*), because it has four batteries of S-200s that were designed and built in the 1960s (as well as some even older, currently stored S-125 systems) which need to be replaced. However, making noise about acquiring additional S-300s in Belarus makes little sense. Minsk clearly is not exceeding the real needs of its national security forces.

Actually, the Belarusian government has little choice at the moment in matters of

66 *Gazeta.pl*, 2014. 'F-16 zostają w Polsce do końca roku. ''Chcemy pogłębić współpracę wojsk specjalnych Polski i USA''', 17 April <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,15820608,F_16_zostaja_w_Polsce_do_konca_roku___Chcemy_poglebic.html> [accessed 9 July 2014].

national security. It has no alternative but to ask Russia for help. As Jury Drakachrust of Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe argued, the July 2012 teddy-bear bombing conducted by Swedish pilots over Minsk ‘has demonstrated the weakness of Belarus’ air defence, and the Russians decided to strengthen it their own way (and have wanted to do so for a long time)’.[67]

Unfortunately, the security situation with Belarus concerns not only Belarus and its neighbours. Increasingly it is becoming a situation where a bigger, more serious confrontation appears to be lurking. In this confrontation Belarus (justly or not) is perceived as Russia’s proxy while Minsk and Moscow consider their neighbouring European states first and foremost as members of NATO. This perception is growing. Thus, Anna Maria Dyner of the Polish Institute of International Affairs proposes that Poland should not only keep modernising ‘its own defence capabilities, [and] pursue regional cooperation’, but also ‘work towards maintaining the involvement of NATO in the region’.[68]

In this context, Belarus can become involved in the geopolitical struggle between the West and Russia with all the dangerous consequences that this would entail. This security policy helps to bring to a halt discussions about the existing state of political repression and not only because Lukašenka can use a military confrontation with the West and historical reminiscences of, say, the World War II to mobilise ordinary Belarusians and distract them from internal political and economic issues. In an open confrontation with the West, Lukašenka would acquire something even more important than additional help from Moscow.

In reality, discussions about potential security threats emanating out of Belarus look rather odd considering the current state of the Belarusian military. Things are indeed in poor shape. The Russian military delegation which visited Belarus in June 2013 found nearly all of the two dozen Soviet-era Belarusian military airfields deactivated and unsuitable for use.

The situation with arms is not much better. Belarus is only gradually modernising its air defence systems with the S-300. But, it has apparently given up on its very public plans to buy Russian made Iskander tactical missile systems. It is no wonder then that Belarus’s national defence budget is one of the lowest among all post-Soviet states and far below the defence budgets of NATO states.

Minsk used the CSTO to put pressure on Russia. During the 2009 ‘milk war’ when Russia banned Belarus’ dairy products, Minsk simply boycotted CSTO meetings

Minsk has frequently failed to convince Russia of its own strategic defensive importance. The Kremlin simply refuses to grant Belarus anymore arms. Warsaw and Prague hoped in vain that the American missile defence system would increase their own importance. The strategic importance of Eastern Europe is inexorably diminishing as the Cold War becomes a part of history and Russia weakens.

Belarus in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation

Internationally, Belarus is mostly engaged in the activities of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Minsk joined the Organisation after fierce debates in 1993. Parliament ratified the Treaty under the condition that Belarusian troops serve within the borders of Belarus. For a long time, Belarus was the last country to sign the treaty, up until Uzbekistan joined the CSTO. Other members of the CSTO include: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. Due to its military

67 Drakachrust, Jury, 2013. ‘Test miadzvedzaha desantu’, Radyjo Svaboda, 4 July <http://www.svaboda.org/content/article/25036593.html> [accessed 9 July 2014].

68 Dyner, Maria Anna, 2013. ‘Perspektywy i konsekwencje współpracy wojskowej Białorusi i Rosji’, *Biuletyn,* Polski Instytut Spraw Miedzynarodowych, 60 (1036), 4 June.

capabilities and prowess Russia dominates the organisation.

Belarus' stipulation of the non-involvement of Belarusian troops abroad has been adhered to. Minsk used the CSTO to put pressure on Russia. During the 2009 'milk war' when Russia banned Belarus' dairy products, Minsk simply boycotted CSTO meetings.[69] The institutional framework of this Organisation enables the Belarusian government to ally itself with other members and resort to legal norms to neutralise Russia (if need be). It should come as no surprise then that Lukašenka in 2011 proudly emphasised that Belarus 'does not have a single CSTO document that is still not ratified'.[70]

Of course, the Belarusian government sometimes works for Russia as well (if it suits Minsk's interests). Belarusian activism in the CSTO allows Moscow to outsource CSTO diplomacy to Minsk and avoid being accused of imperialism.

The second type of Belarusian activity in the CSTO became apparent as the Belarusian government took a more active stance towards the Organisation in the early 2010s. This is in order to strengthen its position in the post-Soviet space and, vis-a-vis the West, gain new leverage over Russia. Since July 2011 the Belarusian leader sought to strengthen the CSTO. He proposed to turn it into an anti-revolution alliance.[71]

Changes proposed by Belarus included overtures to extend the mandate of the CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Forces beyond defence against foreign military aggression. Lukašenka has explained before that 'currently nobody will attack us in a frontal, military manner, but many are eager to do so through an unconstitutional coup-d'état. Nevertheless, immediately afterwards *Izvestia* quoted an anonymous Kremlin official saying that Lukašenka had 'vulgarised' the idea. There was no consent among members on using the CSTO to prevent coup-d'etats.

Back then Lukašenka had many reasons to promote the CSTO and turn it into a counter-revolutionary alliance. His own position was weakening both domestically and internationally. Fearing revolution, he was trying to obtain guarantees of his protection from the CSTO and even foreign military intervention to stop possible civil unrest. Moreover, Lukašenka acted then as chairman of the CSTO, and apparently liked the idea of gaining political weight by making the organisation more powerful. Yet, his plans failed as the CSTO preferred to avoid serious reforms.

> The CSTO cannot make Belarus send it troops to battle even inside the territory of the CSTO member states.

Speaking at the 2011 Dushanbe CIS summit, then Russian president Dmitry Medvedev agreed that often criticism of the abstract and the weak implementation of the commitments taken under the CIS framework had been fair. In contrast he referred to the Customs Union and the CSTO as more successful integration projects. But since 2012 the CSTO has not increased its activity and only effectively functioned in joint military exercises '*Vzaimodeystvie*' *(Interaction)* of their special forces. In September 2012 Belarusian troops participated in joint drills in Armenia[72] and in September 2013 Belarus hosted such exercises.

Russian journalist Arkadi Dubnov pointed out that the 'CSTO essentially constitutes a mechanical connection of three security systems, each of which is based on Russian

69 Petrov, Dmitriy, 2009. 'Sammit gosudarstv ODKB: Soglashenie o KSOP podpisali bez Lukashenko', 14 June <http://vesti7.ru/news?id=14303> [accessed 9 July 2014].

70 BelTa, 2011. 'ODKB do konca goda primet vazhnye shagi po ukrepleniyu organizacii', 12 August <http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/president/ODKB-do-kontsa-goda-primet-vazhnye-shagi-po-ukrepleniju-organizatsii_i_567508.html> [accessed 9 July 2014].

71 Gabuev, Aleksandr, 2011. 'I ODKB vyszla blokom: Patroniruemoe Rossiei objedinenie prevrashchaetsa v kontrrevoliucionnuyu organizaciu', *Kommersant*, 13 August <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1751855> [accessed 9 July 2014].

72 Gazazyan, Ashot, and Amaliya Orandzanian, 2012. 'Ucheniya ODKB v Armenii – bez polityki?', *Deutsche Welle*, 17 September <http://www.dw.de/a-1624602> [accessed 9 July 2014].

participation – Central Asian, South [Caucasian] and Western [Belarus-Russian]'.[73] Moscow likes to call the CSTO a kind of 'post-Soviet NATO', yet as Rafik Sayfullin emphasises, the CSTO lacks the proper implementation mechanisms.

Of course, in NATO some members also hold special positions. However, these positions do not directly have anything to do with the foundations of NATO. Solidarity and collective action prevails in most cases. On the contrary the CSTO fails to do this.[74] Put simply, NATO can send Estonian soldiers to fight the Taliban in the Hindu Kush where no tangible Estonian interests are involved. However, the CSTO cannot make Belarus send its troops to battle even inside the territory of the CSTO member states, (for instance, on the border of Tajikistan and Afghanistan).

Inch by Inch towards NATO

In an interview with the AFP news agency in November 2008 Lukašenka accused NATO of provoking a 'mini arms race' by flying planes near the Belarusian border. To counter this he said that he was considering buying Russian missiles to prop up Belarusian air defence systems. Moreover, in his opinion, it is better not to expand and strengthen NATO but to 'think how we can deconstruct this military machine'.[75] However, the target group for such statements is Russia. These statements do not reflect the actual strategy of the Belarusian government. Indeed, in March 2014 the Belarusian leader publicly declared that his country 'does not define NATO as a potential aggressor and will not do so [in the future]'.[76]

Close military relations with Russia are not indicative of Lukašenka blindly following Moscow. As in other areas, Lukašenka pursues an opportunistic policy, making the best of Belarus' vulnerabilities. According to Dzyanis Melyantsou of the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, Lukašenka has also for years gradually developed military ties with NATO.[77]

Hardly anybody recalls today that it was the government of the newly elected president Lukašenka (in autumn 1994) that declared that the country would join the NATO Programme Partnership for Peace (PfP). Furthermore, the new Belarusian defence minister Anatoli Kascienka insisted that participation in the PfP was necessary in his opinion[78]. In 1995 Belarus became a member of the PfP. This happened after prevarication by the previous government, which despite its more nationalist and pro-Western rhetoric, avoided difficult decisions.

As one might expect, the Belarusian media have downplayed this cooperation with the West. While state officials like to make a fuss about military links with countries like China, they have kept silent on cooperation with NATO. Relations have always been very practical, with minimal legal frameworks and few ceremonies.

Under NATO's PfP, Belarus has reduced its number of arms. In 2004, Minsk joined NATO's Planning and Review Process, effectively requiring the Belarusian military to meet NATO standards in preparation for joint operations. The following year,

73 Dubnov, Arkadii, 2012. 'Tashkent ushel, problemy ostalis'', *Rossiya v globalnoi politike*, 4 September <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/-15644> [accessed 9 July 2014].

74 Sayfulin, Rafik, 2012. 'Kak rozhdayutsia mify?', *Rossiia v globalnoi politike*, 5 September <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Kak-rozhdayutsya-mify-15645> [accessed 9 July 2014].

75 *Vedomosti*, 2008. 'A. Lukashenko predlagaet ''razabrat' voennuyu mashinu NATO''', 24 November <http://www.vedomosti.ru/newsline/news/2008/11/24/688842#ixzz2ziU4Lu8i> [accessed 9 July 2014].

76 *Naviny.by,* 2014. 'Lukashenko: Belarus ne opredeliaet NATO kak potencialnogo agressora', 23 March <http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2014/03/28/ic_news_112_434168/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

77 Eliseev, Andrei, 2010. 'Mezhdu NATO i Rossiei budet bolshaya bitva za Belarus'', *Salidarnasć*, 11 November <http://www.gazetaby.com/cont/print_rdn.php?sn_nid=32285> [accessed 09 July 2014].

78 Rozanov, Anatoli, 1995. 'Belarusian Perspectives on National Security and Belarusian Military Policy', in Bruce Parrott, *State Building and Military Power in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, London, p. 203.

Belarusian soldiers began to take part regularly in NATO exercises.

In 2006, Belarus and NATO approved the first partnership goal set and the PARP Assessment Report thereby completing the process of Belarus' joining PARP. In July 2012, a new partnership goal set was approved. Belarus has assigned the following units for participation in the PARP: one peacekeeping company; one patrol platoon of military police; up to 15 officers for work with multinational staffs; one Il-76MD airlifter; seven health professionals (surgeons and traumatologists); one mobile hospital; one multifunctional nuclear, biological and chemical protection platoon; and a group of specialists on civil-military cooperation.[79]

Belarus has yet to sign an agreement with NATO on sharing classified information. This prevents Belarus from participation in some programmes. But the two sides are cooperating in numerous thematic areas, including civil emergency planning, scientific cooperation and defence reforms.[80]

In 2006, the government set a goal of adopting NATO weapons standards. Since 2011, Minsk has allowed NATO to transport non-military cargo for its troops in Afghanistan through Belarus.[81]

As a result of its hedging-your-bets strategy, the Belarusian military may now compare its equipment, working conditions, and remuneration not only to Russia, but also to NATO. It is too early to say whether Belarus is a reliable NATO partner as its army depends on Russia for equipment, spare parts and training. But the engagement is evident. If Belarus starts serious reforms, current efforts will expedite the transformation of the armed forces in accordance with the role that an army usually plays in a European nation.

Conclusion

The Belarusian army has defensive capacity yet its offensive potential is very limited. Its role in the region has been strongly shaped by its foreign policy. It maintains a trying alliance with Russia while seeking a place between the West and Russia. One of the most important functions of the Belarusian armed forces is to strengthen the government's position in its dealings with Moscow.

Minsk retains effective operational control of Belarusian air defence and tries to hold its ground by trying to influence the commander's appointment.

It is important to recognise that stability and security in the region requires respecting the security of all of its states, including Belarus. So far, Belarusian collaboration with Russia remains limited and reactive rather than proactive. Moreover, since the mid-2000s Belarus has increased its cooperation with NATO. This cooperation is long-term and a relatively successful enterprise, pressing forward without much publicity.

The cooperation of Belarus with Russia in the military field has been recently undermined by Moscow. The Belarusian military has for years suffered from minimal funding, materials and supplies. Recently Russia renounced its previous generous policy on providing Belarusian military with modern equipment at low prices, leaving Belarus with obsolete equipment.

79 The official web site of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Belarus, *Belarus – NATO* <http://www.mil.by/en/military_policy/bel_nato/> [accessed 9 July 2014].

80 The official web site of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 'NATO's relations with Belarus', 5 March 2012 <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49119.htm> [accessed 9 July 2014].

81 The official web site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Belarus, 'Organizaciya Severoatlanticheskogo Dogovora' <http://www.mfa.gov.by/mulateral/organization/list/b129a4a7c02f7d7c.html> [accessed 9 July 2014].

Moreover, the Kremlin does not see Belarus as an ally. Russia aims at taking direct control over components of the Belarusian security apparatus, parts which have the greatest importance to Russia (such as, air defence). Russia also renounced any cooperation in the defence industries field, aiming to replace Belarusian firms providing military equipment parts for Russia with Russian producers, or to buy up Belarusian defence enterprises. It leaves Minsk no choice, but to reconsider its cooperation with Russia.

Still, the Belarusian army remains a different entity, one that exists apart from Russia. Although the air defence systems of Belarus and Russia are now united, Minsk retains effective operational control of Belarusian units and tries to hold its ground even at the highest levels of negotiations by trying to influence the commander's appointment. The rest of the Belarusian army functions separately from Russia. Moscow has no control over it. Belarusian dependence on Russia for equipment and some specialised and advanced training is usual for a country of Belarus' size and geopolitical situation (close to several core Russian regions).

Neighbouring states and the broader Western community should recognise the security concerns of Belarus. It is wrong to see the current Belarusian state as a mere marionette of Russia.

On the other hand, security-related actions, for instance, the harsh reactions towards ordinary military exercises in Belarus, or the promotion of democracy flights over Belarusian territory, may cause a more extensive Russian military presence in Belarus. Such actions present a real danger for the gradual transformation of the country and its integration in the region. In fact, Belarus is not a threat to anybody in the region, or beyond it. Responsible Western politicians and media should avoid helping the Belarusian regime by overplaying the military issues.

Unfortunately, the strategic military situation in Eastern Europe in recent decades has developed its own dynamics, linked, in part, to inflated perceptions of security threats by some regional states and their attempts to involve larger powers from outside the region into regional disputes. In particular, Warsaw and Minsk found that by speculating on an imaginary threat emanating from each other, Poland and Belarus could get money from their respective allies in Moscow and Washington. The Polish and Czech elite have a hard time competing for NATO funds and American military aid which goes to more critical places, such as Afghanistan, or the Middle East.

There are few reasons to contemplate a repetition of the Crimean scenario in Belarus in the near or middle-term. Firstly, the Russian military presence is restricted to two highly specialised military technical facilities and a planned air force base. Effectively, it means that Moscow has no 'stand-by' military forces on the ground. Secondly, Russia has no comparable strategic interest in Belarus as it had in Crimea. Russian military facilities in Belarus whilst valuable do not equate with the importance of the Crimean base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. The Kremlin is also quite satisfied with the Belarusian regime and would hardly risk changing it.

There seems to be only one plausible scenario where Russia could intervene militarily in Belarus in the long-term, a radical pro-Western nationalist takeover of power in Minsk with an anti-Russian programme, close links to the US and an open intent to join NATO. Even under this scenario, Moscow will have more difficulties in Belarus than currently in Ukraine.

The Belarusian state has never faced corruption and the kind of state degradation of a scale comparable to that seen in Ukraine. Moreover, the Belarusian state security agencies and military have always controlled by Minsk. On the other hand, fewer Russians live in Belarus than in Ukraine. They are more scattered than in Ukraine and do not feel alienated from Minsk as they were of Kiev in Ukraine. All these circumstances cannot change overnight, as they result from long-term developments.

Lukašenka will undoubtedly try to use the developments in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine to his own advantage. However, objectively these developments have no direct implications for Belarus.

About the Author

Siarhei Bohdan is an analyst of the Ostrogorski Centre. He is an alumnus of Belarus State University (BSU) and the European Humanities University (EHU) in Lithuania. In 1999-2011, he worked with *Naša Niva*, a Belarusian independent weekly, the EHU and Political Sphere, an institute for political studies. He is working on his PhD thesis at the Freie Universität Berlin. Siarhei comes from Maladečna, Belarus.

The Ostrogorski Centre

The Ostrogorski Centre is a private, nonprofit organisation dedicated to analysis and policy advocacy on problems facing Belarus in its transition to a market economy and the rule of law. Its work is nonpartisan and dedicated to achieving practical results.

Its analysts working in Minsk, Kyiv, London and Berlin understand the challenges of transition in the region because they have lived through it. Educated at the word's leading universities, the centre's experts have cultivated the culture and technical skills required to deliver Western-style analysis.

The main projects of the Centre are *Belarus Digest*, *the Journal of Belarusian Studies* and Belarus Profile.

Ostrogorski Centre

BelarusDigest

This paper is available at
http://belarusdigest.com/analyticalpapers